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SUBJECT: BOSNIAN PARLIAMENT CONFIRMS NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: SARAJEVO 319

Classified By: DCM JUDITH B. CEFKIN, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) At the end of an often heated six-hour debate, the BiH House of Representatives (HoR) on February 9 confirmed the slate of ministers and deputy ministers proposed by Prime Minister Nikola Spiric by a vote of 31-9 with one abstention. Political side deals allowed the government's confirmation to proceed as scheduled, as the coalition parties agreed to confirm the slate of ministers and deputy ministers without three deputy ministers. (Note: Deputies for defense, civil affairs, and transport and communications remain to be filled because the original nominees were found to have conflicts of interest by the Central Election Commission. End Note.) In addition, PM Spiric agreed to proceed with Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic's confirmation at the same time as the rest of the government despite the fact that Cikotic may not take office until April 22 (three years after Cikotic left active military duty). In the interim, Deputy Defense Minister Marina Pendes will be acting minister.

¶2. (C) Rather than focusing as it should have on the relative merits of the ministerial candidates, the debate mostly provided an opportunity for MPs to launch personal attacks on their colleagues. The intra-Bosniak conflict between members of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and the Party for BiH (SBiH) was particularly intense, despite the fact that SDA and SBiH are coalition partners. One of the rare moments when the debate focused on the matter at hand came when the sole MP from the tiny Bihac-based Democratic National Unity (DNZ) party explained he would not vote for the slate because he had reservations about the qualifications of some of the ministerial candidates. The tone of his speech was respectful, and he did not single out the nominees about whom he had reservations. His was the only abstention.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The contentious tone of the debate on what should have been a relatively uncontroversial vote (after all, agreement on the slate was announced well in advance and the vast majority of MPs belong to the coalition parties) could be a foretaste of the nature of upcoming parliamentary sessions. The six-party coalition that makes up the state-level government already was showing signs of fraying, and one issue, the number of deputy ministers each of the two HDZ parties will appoint, remains undecided. Too, the seeming inability of coalition parties to agree the Federation government continues to hold up formation of the state House of Peoples, which means the country remains without a fully-functional parliament. END COMMENT.

